

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands

Witness Statement

STATEMENT BY DAVID MIHALIC, SUPERINTENDENT, GLACIER NATIONAL PARK, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS AND PUBLIC LANDS, HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES CONCERNING THE IMPORTANCE OF PREVENTATIVE MAINTENANCE, HISTORIC PRESERVATION AND FACILITIES IMPROVEMENTS TO MAINTAIN THE INTEGRITY OF GLACIER NATIONAL PARK IN MONTANA, AND ITS RELATION TO THE LOCAL ECONOMY.

August 17, 1999

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, it is my pleasure to welcome you to the Many Glacier Valley of Glacier National Park. Thank you for the opportunity to address the subject of infrastructure management as it relates to our stewardship responsibility and our ability to serve park visitors. We appreciate your interest in learning first-hand about Glacier's cultural and natural resources that are so important to all Americans and critical to Montana's economy.

I'm sure you are aware that facilities and staff throughout the National Park System are provided for the benefit of park visitors and the protection and preservation of park resources. I first came here as a seasonal park ranger in 1972. When I returned as superintendent in 1994, I was amazed to find the facilities that were here to serve the public in 1972 are the same that are here today.

I'd like to address infrastructure needs in terms of facilities and traditional services, highlighting some of the specific problems facing the park, and the solutions that may help us solve them.

Glacier National Park was established nearly 90 years ago and was "set apart as a public park or pleasure ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people of the United States," and for "the preservation of the park in a state of nature". Its cultural significance predates this designation. To the Blackfeet Nation, the mountains comprise the "backbone of the world". In 1932, Congress designated Glacier and Canada's Waterton Lakes as Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park. In addition, Glacier National Park was designated a Biosphere Reserve in 1976 and a World Heritage Site in 1995. Annually, nearly two million visitors come to Glacier from all over the world. Conservative economic models indicate Glacier National Park generates over \$160 million each year to Montana's economy and provides at least 2,500 jobs. You might say that along with Yellowstone, Glacier is the anchor store at one end of Montana's tourism mall.

Glacier National Park's aging facilities have been affected by years of deferred maintenance. The current recorded deferred maintenance in the NPS Project Management Information System (PMIS) for Glacier National Park is \$77 million, not including hotels and roads. For the National Park System as a whole, the comparable estimate is \$1.3 billion, excluding roads and bridges. Since the system has only been in place for 12 months, it is not as complete and accurate a record as I would like to be able to share with you.

While the purpose of today's hearing is to discuss issues associated with Glacier National Park, I must also point out that many of the issues I will describe confront, in different degrees, the 377 other units of the National Park System. Just as Glacier has a deferred maintenance listing that is extensive, so too do many other parks. Just as our budget has grown (from \$6.3 million in FY 90 to \$9.1 million requested for FY 2000), so too has the operational base of the National Park System (from \$767.8 million in FY 90 to \$1.389 billion requested in FY 2000). But the growth in dollars doesn't tell the whole story.

Service-wide, our operational costs have increased due to the addition of new units, newly acquired in-holdings and lands, and newly constructed or renovated facilities. Our costs of doing business have also increased as a result of higher Federal pay and retirement costs, Park Police pension costs, and higher rental costs for leased space and equipment. Advances in technology and the costs associated with trying to keep pace in the "Information Age" have resulted in additional costs Service-wide as have the costs associated with necessary planning and environmental compliance. While this is by no means a comprehensive list, the simple fact is that while our budget has grown, so to have the demands on this and other parks as well.

Here are a few specific examples of the problems we face at Glacier:

- The hotel we are in today, a National Historic Landmark, suffers from severe structural distress. This clearly is visible in "stagger alley," so named because the building leans in two opposite directions in less than 100 feet. Bats infest the rafters and fire detection-suppression systems only meet minimum codes. The costs for restoring this hotel as well as other historic accommodations are in the range of \$100 to \$135 million.
- With Congressman Hill's leadership and with annual funding for park roads up from \$84 million to \$165 million under TEA-21, we are on the way to a solution for repairs to Going-to-the-Sun Road. However, repairs to secondary roads are estimated to cost between \$14 to \$16 million. To bring this home, a visitor recently filed a \$3 million claim against us for damages allegedly resulting from inadequate repairs to the road surface of Chief Mountain Road, just north of here. The claim is equal to the cost of repairs needed for the entire road.
- Glacier has over ten sewage and wastewater treatment systems, most of which are antiquated and in need of substantial repair. For example, no system exists at Logan Pass. The park transports sewage by truck off the mountain for proper disposal three times a day. The backlog of sewer system maintenance and capital improvements is in the range of \$17 million. As of today, no large-scale failure has occurred; however, just two weeks ago, we had an unfortunate spill on the park's west side. This caused a public safety hazard in Apgar Village, and had the potential of spilling raw effluent into a river protected by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.
- Glacier is one of the premier hiking parks in the system, with over 700 miles of trails. However, only 296 miles have been assessed to be in good condition. Approximately 132 miles are in need of major repairs. This amounts to a total of \$4.3 million of deferred trail maintenance.
- Glacier has three primary visitor centers. The only visitor center located on the park's western side is in a converted two-bedroom house in Apgar Village in an out-of-the-way location. Of the 2 million people coming into the park, only 190,000 stop here. This is in contrast to the new, prominently located visitor center outside the park in West Glacier showcasing Alberta and Canadian National Parks.

- As of fiscal year 1998, Glacier had 414,000 objects in our archive and museum collections, housed in facilities that do not meet the National Park Service standards for curatorial storage. Two storage areas are garages with dirt floors; neither facility has heat. There is little or no access for visitors or researchers, nor does the park have exhibit areas in which to share the park's growing collection with the public.
- To operate the park successfully during the summer, housing is needed for over 350 seasonal employees located in 26 different areas. Seasonal rents returned on this housing are inadequate to provide for annual maintenance. The current housing, administrative, and maintenance facilities located at St. Marys are all within a floodplain and must eventually be moved. The cost to relocate these facilities is estimated at \$10 million.

In addition to physical facilities that provide essential services to the public, we provide other essential visitor support services that cannot be measured in bricks or mortar. These services include search and rescue, fire suppression, interpretive services, educational programs, transportation, radio communications for public safety, research and resource management programs, law enforcement, and facility maintenance and operations. It is important to note that we must preserve Glacier's wildlife and scenic grandeur as well as operate and maintain visitor facilities. The result of years of constrained base funding is the deterioration of government assets, reduced services, and diminished capability to respond. Given our limited human resources, we are not adequately contacting our visitors with the information they need to safely enjoy their visit to Glacier. Given available resources, park managers must often make difficult decisions on what services to provide.

Our base funding is used to address day-to-day operational maintenance issues. Special funding for projects is also available from our cyclic maintenance and repair and rehabilitation funds. These funds are awarded competitively within the region and servicewide to address top-priority needs. When we compete successfully for these funds, they oftentimes present a spike in the workload facing our staff. These large maintenance projects require constant administration, financial reporting, project planning and oversight, and other administrative procedures - all of which must be accomplished by existing staff with limited help from regional or central offices.

Other infrastructure needs continue to be addressed in a piece-meal fashion. The fee demonstration program has provided a welcome infusion of funds that has allowed Glacier to accomplish many needed repairs. In 1998, Glacier's 80 percent share of fee revenues amounted to \$2.2 million. After covering the cost of collection, \$1.5 million remained for projects. Since the program's inception three years ago, 38 projects have been started or completed in Glacier through the fee demonstration program. Fee demonstration funds are also being used to improve existing facilities.

Concessionaires face many of the same problems as the National Park Service in attempting to maintain an adequate infrastructure. Any concessionaire asked to invest \$100 million to rehabilitate the historic lodging will require an adequate return on his investment. The concessionaire must look to rate increases to provide that return. We must remember that these historic hotels are privately managed but have public values. Under the 1998 Omnibus Parks Management Act, concession contracts are limited to 20 years. For a concessionaire to get a return on an investment of \$100 million over 20 years, the rates for some hotel rooms could exceed \$500 per night. A government purchase of private interests in these national treasures and appropriations to complete the necessary rehabilitation might be a solution but would have servicewide implications, and would be costly. The new authority to retain and spend concession franchise fees on park facility needs will help, but that will not be enough.

Increases to base funding and adequate provisions for recurring operations and maintenance are critical to the continued health of our national parks. In Glacier and elsewhere in the National Park System, facilities and their associated systems require significant rehabilitation and restoration to preserve the integrity of the natural and cultural resources that define the parks and the visitor experiences that depend on them. To address our top priority needs, the service is working on systems to prioritize cyclic maintenance and repair-rehab funds. Funds to accomplish the needed repairs, research to make informed management decisions, and support of continuing maintenance are needed to forestall the loss of historic fabric, system failure, loss of visitor opportunities, and resource damage. We recognize, however, that more than just funding is needed. We also need to make a number of improvements in how we manage existing funding resources.

Mr. Chairman, we have a new General Management Plan. It addresses four major areas of the park's infrastructure needs: rehabilitation of the historic Going-to-the-Sun Road, rehabilitation of the park's historic hotels, construction of a much-needed discovery center and museum on the west side, and relocation of the park's administrative facilities to a location outside the flood plain. In addition, we identified a five-year repair rehabilitation backlog that amounts to over \$17 million, consisting of over 74 projects, many of which are water and sewer system repairs and upgrades.

The historic hotels, campgrounds, and trails are the soft landings that introduce visitors to the magnificent wonders and stark reality of this special place. They provide the means for visitors to see and learn why America's heritage is so special. As we begin preparations for Glacier's centennial in 2010, we would like to be able to announce plans for rehabilitation of the park's cultural treasures and related visitor services. We would like to enter our second hundred years with a significantly refurbished infrastructure. The job is so great and the challenge so daunting that we will need the next decade to get ready for it.

Thank you for your leadership in bringing these issues to the forefront. Glacier National Park is one of the world's treasures. Our agency's mission is to preserve this and other important parts of America's heritage for future generations while making them available for the benefit of people today. We embrace that challenge and realize our obligation to also seek solutions that are the best for all and serve the public trust. I assure you that is our goal.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my formal remarks. I am happy to respond to any questions that you may have.

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